



## City of Traverse City, City Opera House Heritage Association, City Opera House LLC, and Quinn Evans Architects for the Rehabilitation of the City Opera House, Traverse City

Constructed in 1891 by a consortium of Traverse City businessmen, the City Opera House is among the largest and best-preserved early opera houses in Michigan. Originally designed to seat 1,200 people, the City Opera House also served as a banquet and dance facility. Live performances, speaking engagements and public gatherings continued as the primary use of the facility until about 1920, when the auditorium was leased (until 1940) by a motion picture company; its immediate (and surprising) closure eliminated competition with the company's two other movie theaters downtown. While City Opera House briefly showed films during the early 1940s, the auditorium lights and heat were turned off and the doors closed in 1945. The auditorium sat vacant for almost fifty years.

In the late 1970's the City Opera House Heritage Association (COHHA) proposed the city of Traverse City and the property owner work together to rehabilitate the auditorium as a community cultural center. By 1980 the owner donated the building to the city. The COHHA's role as funding catalyst (its first major gift was received in 1996) allowed serious restoration to begin. Later, the city helped facilitate formation of the City Opera House LLC in 2003, by granting a long-term lease to rehabilitate and operate the auditorium.

With the prominent historic rehabilitation architectural firm of Quinn Evans Architects leading the way, City Opera House LLC set about the task of leading the \$8.5 million restoration and rehabilitation of this community gem. Restoration/rehabilitation work began in earnest in early 2002. The mechanical systems were redone, as were restrooms and the performers' Green Room. The exterior façade and much of the interior was repainted, including the glorious vaulted and domed ceiling. With an investment of some \$5.6 million, the project partners celebrated the reopening of the City Opera House to the public in December 2004.

Thanks to the perseverance of the City Opera House Heritage Association, the cooperation of the city of Traverse City and the partners of the City Opera House LLC, and the expertise and leadership of Quinn Evans Architects, the City Opera House is once again open and available to the community as a grand historic space that meets contemporary needs.

**General Contractor: The Christman Company**

# Historic Preservation in Michigan

